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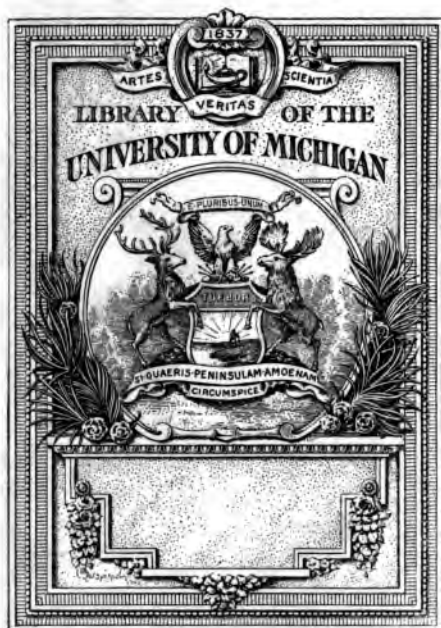
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ASHTON R. WILLARD





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Domenico Morelli



A SKETCH
OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF THE
PAINTER DOMENICO MORELLI
BY ASHTON R. WILLARD
WITH EIGHT HELIOTYPES



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1895

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The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.
Printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.

I desire to express my obligation to Professor Pasquale Villari of Florence, and to Madame Eva Morelli Englen and the Commendatore Giovanni Vonwiller of Naples, for material assistance rendered me in the preparation of this sketch.

A. R. W.

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DOMENICO MORELLI.

IT is not a little singular that the most important movement in Italian painting in the present century should have had its origin at Naples. The part which the great southern capital has played in the history of Italian art has been a peculiar one. It has always enjoyed a primacy among all the Italian cities in the charm of its natural surroundings, and with its wealth of color and exuberance of southern life has apparently offered precisely the conditions which would favor an exceptionally rich and luxuriant artistic development. And yet during the great days of Italian painting its contribution to the national art product was trivial in amount and in value. And in the long array of Neapolitan painters who have practiced their art since then, — we mean those who have been

Neapolitan both by birth and by continuous residence, — there are few men who are now remembered, or who succeeded even in their own day in obtaining any very extended recognition.

The modern movement which we have referred to as so promising, and which has at last given Naples her turn at the artistic ascendancy, is to be attributed largely to the example and influence of a single individual, and, as is usual in such cases, to a man of much original force, independence of views, and fixedness of purpose. Morelli was, in short, a born innovator. He was, and is — for we may happily speak of him in the present tense — one of those men who arrive at new results, not by trying to be original, but by an inward compulsion which will not allow them to be other than original. A man of this stamp never fails to draw others to follow in his footsteps. As early as 1860 his influence had begun to be strongly felt at Naples, and had given a distinctly new tendency to the work of the painters immediately about him. By 1865 he had begun to draw pupils to his studio from all

the southern provinces, and by 1875 the flocking of young men to him for instruction surpassed anything which had been seen in Italy since the days of Canova. In 1880 an Italian jury at an Italian art exhibition issued to him a diploma in which they pronounced him to be the leader of Italian art, — “caposcuola dell’ arte italiana ;” and it is sufficiently significant of the really exceptional distinction which he enjoys to say that in a country like Italy, where artists spring up on every hand like weeds in the soil of an over rich garden, and where professional jealousies are as rife as they are among the artists of any national group in Europe, there was no one to say that the jury exaggerated his importance, or that the rank bestowed upon him was undeserved.

Morelli has not attained to his present position without encountering his full share of the difficulties which usually fall to the lot of artists. The story of his childhood and youth is the story of a continual struggle against hardships and privations. He was born in Naples in 1826, of parents belonging to the humblest class, his

father being a day laborer. Both his father and mother were wholly uneducated and could neither read nor write. They kept no record of the dates of the birth of their children, and Morelli has never known the month, much less the day, when he came into the world. The real name of the family was Soldiero, and this was the name by which the artist was known during his boyhood and until he adopted by his own choice, at about the time that he began to rise into prominence at Naples, the name by which he is now known.

He owes the fact that he received any education at all to the ambition of his mother, who seems to have determined while the child was in his cradle that he should become a priest. She took pains as soon as he arrived at an age where his education could be properly commenced to interest some of the priests of her acquaintance in her project, and as a result of her persistence the boy was given by them some elementary instruction, learning to read and write and even to decline and conjugate a few Latin nouns and verbs. Soldiero, the father, died about 1835,

The Iconoclasts



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Mr. U

and his son's education was then interrupted for a time, it being necessary that the boy should do something to help his mother support her added burdens. But she did not then, or afterward, until she saw that its accomplishment was hopeless, lose sight of her first ambition ; and after keeping him for a year or two at work at a trade she sent him back to his books again, and managed, by persuasion and commands, to keep him at work at them until he was about fourteen.

It seems to have been in 1840 that Morelli's artistic instinct first definitely asserted itself. There is something singular about the way in which this instinct first made itself manifest. While he was studying under his ecclesiastical preceptors, he had managed to obtain possession of a copy of the "*Promessi Sposi*," and to get into his hands also some of the poems of Byron which were then current in Italy in translations, and the verses of some of the Italian poets of the same school. The romance and the poetry revealed to him phases of life of which he had never dreamed, and transported him out of the squalid existence in the midst of which his own

U. N. N.

life was passed into an ideally beautiful world. And what moved him primarily to wish to study art was simply the desire—which amounted with him to a passionate longing—to be able to convert the beautiful visions which these books suggested to him into an objective reality. He did not, like most young artists, exhibit any marked cleverness in drawing. And indeed both at this time and afterward, and one may say all through his life, to bind himself down to an accurate, sculpturesque interpretation of form has always been repugnant to him; and the deficiency, if there is any in his artistic endowment, must be said to be on this side.

His first studies were pursued in the studio of one of the older Neapolitan painters, an artist by the name of Rocco, and were continued at the Accademia delle belle Arti, the government art school. During the first years of his connection with the Academy, his experiences were very far from being agreeable. He found, of course, very speedily that the only thing which he desired to do, namely, to begin immediately to convert into visible form the romantic visions

Morelli

which filled his brain, did not at all coincide with the ideas of his preceptors as to the manner in which his instruction should commence. The severe drill which they imposed upon him instead was extremely distasteful to him, and his work, consequently, was very poorly performed. For two years he made little or no perceptible progress, and had to endure as best he could the constant reproaches of his mother, who openly upbraided him for throwing away his time. This unhappy period was brought to an end, finally, by Morelli's determination to make an effort at changing his point of view and trying to master the technical methods of his art as the Academy taught them. A Neapolitan connoisseur who had come to take an interest in him helped him in carrying out this determination by assigning him a small pension on condition that he should make a careful drawing from the cast of the Laocoön. This ungrateful task was as repugnant to the visionary young artist as any which could possibly have been imposed upon him, but it was laboriously accomplished to the satisfaction of his patron, and seems to have

resulted in initiating him into the secrets of certain academic processes which he had before that regarded as wholly beyond his grasp. At any rate, after the drawing of the *Laocoön*, and perhaps some other self-imposed drill of the same description, Morelli, upon resuming his regular work at the school, found it somewhat easier to satisfy his instructors, and venturing to enter one of the school competitions for drawing from the nude he had the good fortune to win the prize. The gratifications of success tempted him to continue his efforts in the same direction, irksome as the discipline undoubtedly was to him; and after this he seems to have regularly taken a place among the promising pupils and to have gone on with his work without further difficulties.

We do not discover at precisely what time he ceased to attend the classes at the Academy, but apparently it was in 1846. In that year, upon what he had been able to save out of the prizes which he had received in the school competitions, he made a brief expedition to Rome, and upon his return to Naples established him-

self in a studio — sufficiently humble — of his own, and seems to have at once commenced independent work. The picture which he first produced is not of much interest in itself, but it is of some importance as indicating the trend of his thought at this time and the persistence of his first idea. His romantic visions immediately regained possession of his imagination the moment he felt himself free from the surveillance of his academical instructors, and he chose as the subject of his picture a passage in one of the poems of Byron, the "Corsair," selecting the incident of the parting between the hero and Medora. He seems to have worked upon this canvas for nearly a year, and having completed it sometime in the spring of 1847, he offered it for exhibition at the annual Neapolitan salon. The picture did not find favor with the jury and was rejected, an occurrence which caused a bitter disappointment to the young artist, who had put his whole soul into his work and had not unnaturally looked forward to achieving some exceptional popular success.

How bitter was his disillusionment will be

made clear by the fact that he resolved immediately after this unhappy incident to shake the dust of Naples from his feet and make his artistic home in some other locality, where the avenues to popular recognition and success were less jealously guarded by the bigoted defenders of the old régime in art. It seemed to him at this moment that Rome would offer him precisely the artistic environment which he desired ; and he accordingly disposed of all his poor effects, abandoned his Neapolitan studio, and before the end of May had found his way to the Holy City. The venture was a somewhat audacious one, for he had no friends in Rome, and more than once during the year which he passed there he came dangerously near starvation. He concentrated all his energies, during this year, upon the painting of a single picture, representing the Madonna, the infant Christ, and St. John, which was exhibited at the annual Roman exhibition held in the spring of 1848. He had no difficulty in getting his canvas admitted to the exhibition, and it seems to have been received with rather exceptional favor by the Roman public.

It is difficult to see that this sojourn at Rome had any influence whatever upon Morelli, so far as concerns the formation of his personal style, or that he was affected to any perceptible degree by the example of the men who were practicing their art about him. The general character of the work of the Roman painters of this period is now well known, as it is to be seen spread upon the walls of the churches which were being restored or reconstructed during the middle of the century. The leaders among the Roman artists of that day were strong in drawing, and deserve much credit for their successful efforts in reviving the almost lost art of fresco. But there is little in their plain, straightforward and somewhat businesslike manner of interpreting the subjects with which they undertook to deal to appeal to the romantic, enthusiastic temperament of Morelli. The statement has been made in print that he became, while in Rome at this time, the pupil of Overbeck, and received from the German master the impulse which led him to devote himself later in life so largely to religious subjects. But the direct influence of

Overbeck upon Morelli was really very slight, inasmuch as it consisted merely in the occasional correction of his drawing; and Morelli's fondness for religious subjects — which in fact did not become marked until ten or twelve years later — must be accounted for in some other way.

After the successful exhibition of his Roman picture he came rather suddenly to the conclusion that he could not profitably remain any longer in the papal city, and accordingly returned to Naples sometime in March or April, 1848. He had hardly reestablished himself in his studio there when the so-called revolution of the 15th of May broke out; and having in his nature something of the characteristic Neapolitan excitability, he found it impossible to remain merely a passive observer of this heroic but ill-fated attempt at throwing off the Bourbon yoke. We owe a graphic narrative of Morelli's participation in the events of that historic day to Professor Michele Lessona,¹ who took down the story from the painter's own

¹ *Volere è potere*, p. 120.



Salve Regina



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lips. According to Lessona, Morelli heard rumors of the impending conflict at daybreak, and, hastily leaving his studio, hurried down to the Toledo, finding barricades already erected, and the "revolution" fairly begun. Seizing some sort of a weapon he plunged into the fray himself, and fought behind the barricades as long as there was any chance of defending them, or making headway against the Bourbon troops. He was finally captured, with a handful of his companions, in a house in which they had intrenched themselves when they were dislodged from their position behind the barricades; and was compelled to march through the streets, under nominal escort of a file of soldiers, but subjected all the way to the fury of the "lazaroni," to the arsenal, where he was temporarily confined. In this perilous progress he received several wounds, one of them in the face. Many of the prisoners taken to the arsenal that day were summarily executed, and Morelli and his companions confidently expected the same fate as the rest. The painter, however, being severely wounded, was removed from the arsenal

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to the Marine Hospital, and passed the night of the 15th there. At midnight the king and his brothers, accompanied by some police officers, visited the hospital, and held a sort of inquisition among the prisoners. They attempted to subject Morelli to their cross-examination, along with the rest ; but he was too much reduced by his wounds to be able to answer their questions, and his case was accordingly postponed. He remained at the hospital several days. The police, meanwhile, investigated his previous history, and, finding that he had not been connected with the plotting which had preceded the outbreak, he was finally discharged.

Resuming work in his studio, he devoted all his energies for the next two years to winning the Roman pensionate, or *prix de Rome*, which was annually awarded by the Neapolitan Academy of Fine Arts, and which entitled the pensioner to six or seven years' residence in the papal city at the expense of the government. To the annual competition of 1848 he contributed a picture which he called "*Van der Welt in mezzo ai Corsari sopra una riva romita.*" The choice

of the subject shows that romantic themes had again assumed their sway over his imagination, and that the selection of a religious subject for his Roman picture cannot be taken to indicate the general trend of his thought and taste at this time. The "Van der Welt" was not successful in winning the prize, and Morelli made a second trial in the following year, submitting in the competition of 1850 his "Goffredo a cui appare l' angelo Gabriele," representing a scene in the first canto of the "Gerusalemme." The second picture was marked by fewer of his personal peculiarities, and the jury, composed largely or entirely of academic professors, was reluctantly compelled to recognize the exceptional merit of the work. He was accordingly, in 1850, awarded the prize; but was deprived of the principal advantages supposed to accrue from it, being required, because of the unsettled political condition of Rome at this time, to pursue the studies of his pensionate at Naples.

The next five years were comparatively uneventful. Profiting by the improvement in his circumstances which he owed to his pension, he

pressed his suit for the hand of the Signorina Virginia Villari, and in March, 1851, the marriage took place. Pasquale Villari, the brother of his wife, had for some years before this been Morelli's most intimate friend. He had helped the artist with gifts of money during his difficult year at Rome; and early in 1848 had written and published at Naples a pamphlet in praise of his Roman picture. He had fought side by side with Morelli in the "revolution" of the 15th of May, and as a result of his connection with that affair had been obliged to abandon Naples and establish himself at Florence, where at the time of which we are now speaking, he had already commenced the critical and historical studies which later bore fruit in his life of Savonarola, and his well-known work upon Machiavelli. The deprivation of Villari's counsel and support was a serious loss to Morelli, and we shall find him later, in a moment of great discouragement and dejection, abandoning his home and taking up his residence at Florence, where he could again enjoy the stimulating companionship of his friend. Just at this time he had nothing

to do but plod along as best he could at Naples, and acquit himself of his duties toward the Academy by sending to it once a year the "envoi" required by the terms of his pensionate. None of these academic studies are of any especial interest at this day, if we except the "Iconoclasts," the last of the series; and our interest in that is owing principally to the fact that it shows the stage at which Morelli had arrived at this time in the development of his personal style. The print of this work, which we have included among the illustrations, makes it unnecessary to speak of it at any length here in the text. It is very obvious that Morelli made concessions in many particulars to the academic prejudices of the day. The composition seems to us, now, stiff, formal, and over-emphasized, and the drawing shows more of the precision and completeness still exacted by public taste at that time, than it would have shown if the painter had been left free to pursue his own inclinations. There is nothing very novel about the work, either in light and shade or in color, the tone of the picture being a subdued harmony

of dark hues with a prevailing greenish cast, and the chiaroscuro very similar to that of other Italian pictures of the same period.

The picture had the good fortune to be purchased by the government for the royal collection at Capodimonte, and probably the artist received a handsome sum for it, measured by the standard of that day. At any rate, shortly after it was thus happily disposed of, he resolved to widen his acquaintance with the work of contemporary European artists; and for that purpose determined to make an extended tour and to visit the cities of northern Italy, of Germany, and of France. In carrying out his plan he traveled first to Florence and then to Milan. From Milan he pushed on across the Alps, visiting Munich, Dresden, and Berlin, — taking with him to Berlin a letter to the sculptor Rauch which procured him many courtesies and attentions. Continuing his journey he visited Düsseldorf, then perhaps of more importance than it is at present as an art centre; from Düsseldorf he proceeded to Amsterdam, to The Hague, and to Brussels, visiting all the galleries and

collections, public and private, to which he could obtain access, and forming some personal acquaintance at Brussels with the historical painter Louis Gallait, who was already at that time regarded as the leader of the contemporary Flemish school. Morelli also made a brief expedition to London, but of what he saw there, or of the impression made upon him by the work of the English painters of that day, we have unfortunately no information.

From London his journey was continued to Paris, really the Mecca of his expedition. The first "exposition universelle" was then in progress, and the young Neapolitan painter had consequently the best possible opportunity to familiarize himself with the work of the men who were then regarded as the leaders of the French school. Delacroix had thirty or more canvases on the walls of the exhibition. Decamps was represented by a number of important works, and Meissonier had contributed his famous picture of "The Quarrel" and several characteristic examples of miniature genre. We mention these men in particular because they were the

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Academy at Rome had frequently made extended sojourns at the Villa Medici. He had had, therefore, the best of all opportunities for learning the names and faces and the capacities of the men who were distinguishing themselves in his own profession south of the Alps.

Morelli returned direct from Paris to Naples, without attempting to see anything more of the world, and reëstablished himself immediately in his studio. Five years followed, during which he was obliged to struggle constantly against the depressing influence of uncongenial surroundings, feeling sadly the need of the independent means which would have enabled him to pursue at his leisure the studies in which he was interested, and practice his art according to his own exalted ideals. He had violated the terms of his pension by leaving Naples to make his northern tour without the permission of the Academy, and consequently, after his return, was deprived of this important contribution to his revenues. In 1857, finding it impossible to make any headway against the adverse conditions in which he was placed, he left Naples and went to Florence,

where he passed eight or nine months, painting while there his "Mattinata fiorentina al tempo di Lorenzo de' Medici." Returning to Naples toward the close of the year 1857, or at the beginning of the following year, he took part in a public competition which had been opened by the Bourbon government for designs for the decoration of the church of S. Francesco at Gaeta, then recently completed, and produced a set of "bozzetti" which are, to us, the most interesting of his early works. They are broad and sketchy in drawing, but are far more natural and unconventional in composition than his academic *envois*, and exhibit already in a very marked manner his capacity for seizing and emphasizing the characteristic lines of his subjects. His designs were awarded the prize by the jury in the competition, but the matter went no farther, as the speedy fall of the Bourbon government put an end to the project of decorating the church. Early in 1861 he left Naples again, and passed the greater part of that year at Milan, forming close friendships with the then prominent painters of the Milanese group, and managing to com-

plete two pictures. One of these, the "Count Lara and his Page," treated a Byronic subject in the manner which was characteristic of him at this time. The other, known as the "Bagno di Pompei," is almost unique in the whole list of his pictures in having no "literary" subject. He proposed to himself in this work simply the task of painting the interior of the calidarium of a bath of the Roman period, and concentrated all his efforts upon the accurate rendering of a peculiar effect of light, the room being illuminated from a single window placed high up under the curve of the vaulting.

Both of these Milanese pictures were purchased by the Commendatore Giovanni Vonwiller of Naples, whose name the reader will find frequently mentioned in the list of Morelli's works which we have added by way of appendix and summary at the end of this sketch. The Commendatore Vonwiller deserves to be mentioned, and prominently mentioned by any one who attempts to put together the principal facts of Morelli's career, because he had so large a share in making that career possible. We men-

tioned that by his journey to northern Europe in 1855, the artist forfeited his pension at the Academy, and that for a year or two afterwards he was in some distress. Signor Vonwiller came to his assistance in 1857, by purchasing the "Mattinata fiorentina," the picture painted at Florence, and after 1860 purchased almost all of his work for five or six years. Referring to this generous assistance, Signor Vonwiller simply says that it was his "privilege" to give the young artist some aid after he lost his pension; which is hardly the language in which we are accustomed to hear great bankers refer to what they condescend to do for members of the Bohemian crafts. Morelli repaid the generous interest of Vonwiller by giving him his unreserved friendship; and a relation of mutual regard sprang up between the two men at that time which has subsisted without diminution of warmth to this day.

To continue our narrative, we should mention that at just about the time of which we are now speaking, that is to say soon after Morelli's return from Milan, he took an active part in the

formation of the independent society of artists which was organized at Naples to promote the liberal movement in art, and protect the interests of the men who were connected with it. The project for the formation of some such society had been under consideration at Naples since 1856 or 1857, and the general upheaval of Neapolitan affairs which took place in 1860 led to the movement's finally taking definite shape. The society was called the *Società Promotrice*. Its primary purpose was to hold an annual exhibition to which works of art could be admitted without running the gauntlet of academic criticism ; and it may also have had some other subsidiary purpose which we would not undertake to specify. Morelli was urged by his associates to take the presidency of the society, but declined, and after his refusal this position was tendered to and accepted by his friend Filippo Palizzi, the animal-painter. The new society thus organized, we may say here, more than justified all the expectations which had been formed of it, and has continued to exist and to hold its exhibitions annually down to the present

time. The value of such an organization to the artistic craft was speedily perceived by artists in other Italian cities, and societies similar in purpose, though not always in name, were formed within the next ten years in most of the other towns where there were large groups of artists. The creation of these societies could not have failed to produce a very perceptible effect in encouraging the independent movement all over Italy ; and the propaganda of liberalism thus initiated must not be omitted from consideration in estimating the influence of Morelli on the art-expression of his day.

Upon Morelli's own processes of work, just at this period, some light is thrown by a few notes placed at our disposal, in manuscript, by the Cavaliere Francesco Netti, the Neapolitan painter and critic, who became acquainted with Morelli as early as 1855, and was much in his studio in the years between 1860 and 1864. His observations confirm an impression which one would be disposed to form independently from a mere examination of Morelli's pictures ; and that is, that he was largely dependent upon

moods, and could not approach his canvases except when the fever was on him. "Morelli, according to my impression of him," Netti writes, "has never been what would be called a systematic worker. I have often seen him set his palette and make an appointment for his model in the morning, and then pass the whole day without touching a brush to his work. But I should add that by way of compensation for this lack of application, every stroke of the brush, when he actually got to work, was a final thing. It was the result of mature consideration and long internal debate, and was put on with conviction. It is this which explains his peculiar 'facture,' which is broad and sure, sometimes excessively synthetic and exhibiting a disregard for detail. It may be that the very hours which seemed to be given over wholly to idleness and to chatting with his friends were precisely the ones in which he gave the most thought to his pictures. I remember seeing him once enter his studio in haste after a long walk, and, without taking off his hat or laying down his stick, sit down before his easel and rapidly finish an

admirable sketch which was barely suggested when he began. His powers of observation must, it seems to me, have been very rare and unusual, and his memory extremely retentive of the colors and forms of objects, to enable him to reproduce them with so much fidelity after he had seen them only once. His multitude of 'bozzetti'—and he has produced some most beautiful ones—furnish the most striking evidence of this exceptional faculty."

To the first exhibition of the Società Promotrice, held in 1862, Morelli contributed a large canvas on a literary subject, "Tasso reading his verses to the three Eleonoras." Unstinted praise was lavished upon this work by the Neapolitan critics and connoisseurs of the day. It went immediately to the Commendatore Vonwiller's gallery, and was given the place of honor in his collection for years, remaining there until 1893, when he took it down from his walls and presented it to the King and Queen on the occasion of their silver wedding. It has since been hung, by direction of the Queen, in one of the state apartments at Capodimonte, where it

The Madonna of the Golden Stair



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can be favorably compared with the "Iconoclasts," Morelli's earlier work in the same collection. In the same year in which the "Tasso" was completed and exhibited, Morelli also painted his "Profughi di Aquileia" and his "Menestrello," and in the following year "La barca della vita." We are unable to give the names of any other works produced between 1863 and 1867, except the "Moglie di Potifarre" and the "Freschi a Venezia," which were painted in 1864; but find it difficult to believe that he was so inactive during this period as the gaps in the list of his pictures would seem to indicate.

In the year 1867 came the second Paris exposition, and Morelli, for the first time since 1855, left Italy and made his second, and last, journey abroad. He was appointed a member of the art jury at the exhibition; and Villari, who accompanied him to Paris, was associated with him in this function. The jury dealt not over fairly with Morelli; and his own presence in their membership of course harmed rather than helped his cause, since he was not the man to solicit favors for himself. He had

sent three pictures to the exposition, the two painted at Milan and the "Tasso;" and here it is necessary to qualify the statement just made to the effect that the "Tasso" remained in Signor Vonwiller's gallery until presented to the sovereigns. All three of Morelli's exhibition pictures were loaned to him, for the purpose of being sent to Paris, by his friend and patron; and there is little question that there was enough merit in them to entitle him to the highest Italian award. The principal recompense, however, in the department of painting was decreed to Professor Ussi of Florence, who was awarded a grande médaille d'honneur, while Morelli's pictures obtained for him only a médaille première classe.

For a number of years after his return from this expedition to Paris, much of Morelli's time was occupied with his pupils; and we think there is no error in saying that as early as 1870 he had become more popular as an instructor than any other master in Italy. He must have been, before this, urged to accept a chair in the Academy, which had been reor-

ganized early in the sixties, and its name changed to "Institute" (so odious had the word academy become), but we do not find that he finally entered the corps of instructors until 1878. This is the date given us by his daughter;¹ nevertheless it is true that almost all the more promising of the young men who were coming up between 1865 and 1875, now take pains to set themselves down as "pupils of Morelli." This is especially true of the aspirants for artistic fame from the lower provinces. Among the artists now enjoying any considerable degree of prominence at Palermo or Naples, it is difficult to find one who does not claim to have come at this period under Morelli's influence. We find also that he attracted pupils from Rome, Florence, Leghorn, and Genoa, and even from Turin, Milan, and Venice.

The most distinguished of his pupils is, without question, Francesco Paoli Michetti, who studied under him while he was a professor at the Institute. The wide difference between

¹ Madame Englen has since written us that she was in error as to this date, and that it should be 1868.

Michetti's manner and Morelli's is sufficiently significant of the latter's method of instruction. It was quite apart from his purpose to make any effort to impose his own manner on a pupil; what he aimed at was simply to lead the pupil's natural temperament toward its own most effective and characteristic expression. Madame Englen does not seem to think that in every case her father's pupils have fully appreciated their obligations to him, and mentions that in some instances his extreme sensitiveness has been deeply wounded by their ingratitude. But it is also true that many of his pupils have entertained for him a regard little short of idolatry, and have exhausted the whole vocabulary of praise in expressing their appreciation of his genius.

It would not be strange if, while he was busied with the duties of his professorship, he should have slighted his own work to some extent; and yet the number of pictures produced during the fifteen years between 1865 and 1880 is about the same as the number produced in the fifteen years before the former date, when he was at

the plenitude of his youthful freshness and vigor. The "Assumption," which he painted for the ceiling of the Cappella Reale at Naples, must have been completed soon after his return from his second journey to Paris. An early picture, of the subsequently extended series of compositions on religious subjects, "Christ walking on the Water," belongs to the year 1867; another, "Christ Mocked," to 1871; and still another, "Christ and the Swineherds" (*Gli Ossessi*) to 1876 or 1878. The latter became the property of the composer Verdi, and hangs at present in one of the rooms of his "quartiere" at the Palazzo Doria in Genoa, — one of the most admired objects in his valuable collection of works of modern art.

Sometime before 1878, Morelli completed his "Temptation of St. Anthony," which is usually regarded in Italy as the most important picture of the period of which we are now speaking — the period, that is, between 1865 and 1880. The subject would hardly find favor anywhere outside of Italy or France, but every one would be obliged to concede that the execution was mas-

terly. The "St. Anthony" was sent to Paris in 1878, while the exposition of the Trocadéro was in progress, and privately exhibited at Goupil's, where it attracted much attention. Two years afterward it was again exhibited, this time at a national Italian Exposition held at Turin (1880), and won for its author the prize of 10,000 lire, reserved by the government for the best work of art. Morelli also at that time received a diploma from the exposition jury, in which he was honored with the title of leader of the contemporary Italian school.

• In all these later works, produced after 1865, there is little or nothing visible of the style of the "Iconoclasts," or of the other pictures produced during the period while he was sending his annual *envois* to the Academy and striving to conform to some extent to the artistic standards of the day. Morelli gradually abandoned this manner altogether; and the change, so far as drawing and composition are concerned, appears to have come about as the result of a quite natural course of evolution. It seems abundantly clear, from some of the examples of broad



The Marys on the way to Calvary

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of the figures is naturalness itself. The painter has entirely rejected the aid of gestures, and has made no use of facial expression as a help to interpreting his meaning. And yet the story is more vividly told than it could possibly have been if all the usual expedients had been exhausted.

The contrast between the pictures painted before 1867 and those of the later series, painted between 1867 and 1878, of which we are just now speaking, is quite as striking in point of color and light-and-shade, as it is in composition and drawing. The later pictures are flooded with light and the most brilliant hues are somewhat lavishly employed. As his youthful efforts, even where he was following his own instincts in composition and drawing, do not in any degree foreshadow his later palette or his later chiaroscuro, it is difficult to account for the change except on the theory of contact with some outside influence—a revelation to him, that is, of certain possibilities, which he had not guessed, by some earlier explorer of the new field.

Some of the critics of Morelli's work have been prone to jump to the conclusion that this explorer was Fortuny. How far this judgment is true we would not presume to determine. But this much may be said, that irrespective of the merit of the original discovery, Morelli made use of whatever color suggestions he may have received from Fortuny to far better purpose than did Fortuny himself, who after all employed his extraordinary responsiveness to color merely to portray color, with nothing or next to nothing behind it. Morelli after his new discovery, as before, almost always had an ethical or philosophical idea to convey, perhaps some extremely serious and profound story to tell, as in the picture of the Marys; and he made use of all his new discoveries in expression — whether in color or anything else — to tell his story more effectively, and not simply to ornament an empty phrase.

It is undisputed that Morelli had a high regard for Fortuny, admired his work, and cherished toward him personally, in Fortuny's later years, an affection which had a certain element

of tenderness in it that cold-blooded and "sensible" Englishmen and Americans would have some difficulty in understanding. The Spanish artist was much younger than the Italian. When he first came to Italy as Spanish *prix de Rome* in 1857, he was only nineteen years old, and Morelli was then thirty-one. We do not know in precisely what year the acquaintance of the two artists began. Madame Englen says her father knew Fortuny from the time when the latter "was studying as a young man in Rome." Later he became "*amicissimo suo*," and the friendship continued unbroken and unmarred up to Fortuny's death. During that last year of his life, six months of which, from May to October, 1874, the gifted young Spaniard spent at Naples, they must have been much together. Fortuny returned to Rome toward the close of October, and in November his friends in Naples were shocked to hear of his death. Morelli hastened to Rome to join in the last honors done to his memory, and walked in the procession, after his coffin, to the tomb. It is fairly significant of the closeness of the intimacy

between the Neapolitan and the Spanish artist that the most personal of all of Fortuny's working-tools should have been given to Morelli. After his death various memorials of him were divided among his friends, and in this division it was Morelli's privilege to receive his palette. It was placed in his hands, Madame Englen says, by Señor Casado, director of the Spanish Academy in Rome.

To return to our narrative, we may record briefly the few facts of any salience which remain to be noted in his personal history. He continued to perform the duties of his professorship at the Institute until 1881, when, owing to some difference of opinion between himself and the then minister of public instruction, he resigned ; with decided advantage to himself, since he was placed once more in the entire command of his own time, but with serious detriment to the school. Nothing occurred after his retirement from the Institute to interrupt either pleasantly or painfully the even tenor of a very tranquil existence until 1888. In the latter part of that year Madame Morelli died, and her death

caused a shock to the sensitive system of the artist from which he did not rally for some time. As we shall not have occasion to refer to his family again, we may mention here that six children were born of this marriage, four sons and two daughters, all of whom are now living. Strange to say, none of them have become artists. Madame Englen, in referring to this, says simply that her father failed to discover in any of his children any exceptional artistic gift, and consequently discouraged their following his profession, not wishing to make "spostati" of them, — a characteristic Italian word, which is to be interpreted literally, "misplaced." Madame Morelli was a woman of great modesty, who passed all her life in retirement. "She was most devoted to my father," her daughter says, in speaking of her character and of the place which she occupied in the household, "and simply existed for him and for her children. She made it her constant effort to remove every possible difficulty from his path, so far as lay in her power, shielding him from every anxiety and solicitude, and making it possible for him, even

when he had young children growing up about him, to consecrate himself entirely to his art. She was taken completely into her husband's confidence, and used to surprise him not a little at times by the masculine vigor of her opinions and the elevation of her sentiment. She was simplicity and frankness itself, but at the same time a woman of genuine culture and unusual intelligence. Her life was wholly passed within the four walls of her household among her children, and she took part only in sympathy in the honors and attentions shown to her husband. She was never seen at any festivity or at any place of public gathering. And although her husband made her absolute mistress of all his earnings, she never possessed an evening gown and never wore a jewel."

We should perhaps have mentioned that in 1886, two years before his wife's death, Morelli was elevated to the rank of Italian Senator, an honor extended to him by the King in recognition of his distinction in art. With us it would seem a very singular idea to make a person a member of a politico-legislative body simply be-



The Dying Christ

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PATER DIMITTE ILLIS NOM
ENIM SCIUNT
QD FACIANT



André

cause he had distinguished himself as an artist. But in Italy the senatorship is a sort of peerage, and in a country where knighthoods are distributed broadcast, and where it is a poor man indeed who cannot be "Cavaliere," an appointment to the upper house of parliament for life is almost the only honor left for personages of real distinction. It is hardly necessary to mention that Morelli does not attend the sessions of the exalted body of which he is a member, and except for the title has been as little a senator since 1886 as he was before; not even assisting with his vote to support the wise measures proposed by his brother-in-law, Professor Villari, during his term of service as minister of public instruction in 1891 and 1892.

The death of his wife, as we have mentioned, made a deep impression on Morelli's extremely sensitive nature, and for a time wholly took away his inclination for work. He began to busy himself with thoughts of pictures again in 1889, painting in that year two scenes from contemporary Neapolitan life,—the only instances so far as we are aware in which he has ventured

upon subjects of that character. Since then he has added several canvases to his series of biblical pictures, the two most notable among them being the "Christ calling the Fishermen to be his Disciples" and the "Christ in the Desert." The latter he is not yet quite willing to call finished ; and it still remains on an easel in his studio awaiting the moment of inspiration which shall enable him to solve his last remaining doubts. It is a picture in which he became intensely absorbed when he first commenced it three or four years ago, — absorbed to the point where, as he said, the painting of the Syrian desert gave him a choking sensation at the throat as he worked upon it ; but with the introduction of the figures his problems commenced ; and after many different experiments and much erasing and repainting, he has still failed to give the work precisely the character which he desires.

Sometime before 1891, he undertook a peculiar task, none other than the designing of a vast scheme of decoration for the façade of a church ; and some reference should be made to

this important work before our review of his career is brought to a conclusion. The church which he was invited to decorate is the old cathedral of Amalfi, a structure of the eleventh or twelfth century, which he found, at the time the commission was placed in his hands, wholly bare of ornamentation of any description, above the line of the roof of the lateral naves, if we except a zone of shallow niches running across the front at the level of the clerestory. It was the painter's idea to fill these niches with standing figures of patriarchs and ecclesiastics, and to spread one great picture in mosaic over the whole pediment. His plans approved themselves to his patrons, his designs were prepared, and have since been transferred in imperishable material to the front of the church by the most expert of Italian workmen. The subject of the large composition filling the pediment is taken from the Apocalypse, and in the arrangement of the figures — Christ enthroned in the centre with the groups of the Elders on either side — suggests the mosaics of the Byzantine period, which indeed the painter declares that he took

as his guides. The coloring, which has been copied from his cartoons with marvelous accuracy by the mosaic workers, is, however, characteristically his own, and proclaims the authorship of the work instantly to any one familiar with his paintings.

Morelli still occupies the studio at No. 39, Via Pace, where he has been established since 1864, and as we write has just completed there a large canvas which he will send to the international art exhibition to be held at Venice during the present year. His rooms are large and conveniently arranged, but evidently no attempt has been made to give them an air of luxury or of picturesqueness. Their prevailing character is oriental, and there are few suggestions anywhere of his earlier "romantic" period. The floors are covered with Turkish rugs, and low red divans serve as seats. Various objects of oriental art in pottery and metal work are scattered about upon shelves and tables, and pieces of Syrian embroidery and tapestry have been fastened up where space could be found for them against the walls. Indeed, almost the only re-

minder of his earlier tastes and methods is the large cartoon of the "Tasso," which still holds the place high up on the wall of the outer studio which he assigned to it when he first came to occupy his present work rooms.

The objects in his studio of greatest interest to his visitors have usually been — after the pictures in process of execution — the "bozzetti" or studies with which his portfolios are filled. In a sketch of his life and work so brief as that which we have proposed to ourselves here, it is impossible to speak of these studies at any length, but we have introduced a reproduction of one of them among the illustrations, which will serve in a general way to indicate the character of them all. They are all vigorous and powerful, apparently executed with the greatest haste and wholly lacking in detail, but managing to convey an impression of reality and of life which the most elaborate of finished pictures often fail to produce.

In the example selected for illustration, Morelli has undertaken to represent an incident in the history of the prophet Jeremiah. The seer

has just come forth into the streets of Jerusalem to utter his prophecy of the destruction of the city, the punishment to be visited upon it by the wrath of Heaven for its violation of divine law. As he utters his vaticination, he dashes an earthen vessel to the ground, and declares that the city itself shall be shattered even as the vessel of clay lies shattered at his feet. The illustration shows at a glance Morelli's vigorous and unique manner of interpreting incidents in religious history, and it is unnecessary to remark upon the gulf which separates his personal methods and principles from those of the classic Italian school. How such a subject would be interpreted by those who still cling to the time-honored theories of the latter group can easily be imagined, — a classic portico, perhaps, for a background, and in the foreground a group of dignified personages in Roman togas listening with awestruck countenances to the declamations of some conventional prophet with corrugated brow and dramatic gesture. Morelli contented himself with reporting the historical fact as, accepting the time and place assigned to it,



A Moment of Prophecy



U. S. N.

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it must have occurred. An oriental of the orientals, attired in the dress which they wear to-day and wore then, comes out of his dwelling and delivers himself of the message which has been prophetically revealed to him. There is no artificially prepared audience gathered to listen to his words. He finds about him only the idlers and loungers who pass their useless existence in the streets. And yet the rejection of forced effect, the refusal to arrange and balance his composition to suit a preconceived theory of the beautiful or the impressive, gives a vividness to his representation of the scene which in any "classic" version of it we should seek in vain.

LIST OF PICTURES.



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THE following list contains the names of all of Morelli's pictures, with the date at which they were painted and the names of the present owners so far as we have been able to ascertain them.

A. D.

1846. Il Bacio del Corsaro.

Owner unknown.

1847. Madonna che culla il Bambino.

In a private chapel at Formia, near Gaeta.

1848. Van der Welt in mezzo ai Corsari sopra una riva romita.

In the collection of the Signora Meuricoffre, Naples.

1850. La Monaca di Monza.

Owner unknown.



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We have been unable to learn the date of this picture ; but it is apparent from the general character of the work that it was painted before 1867.

1867. *Gesù sulle acque.*

Owner unknown. Madame Englen believes the picture to be in America.

1868. *Un Paggio innamorato.*

In the collection of the Signora Maglione Oneto, Naples.

Four versions of this work exist ; two of which are owned in America.

1868. *La Parisina.*

In the Vonwiller collection.

1868. *L'Assunta.*

In the Cappella Reale, Naples.

1868. *Gesù deposto dalla Croce.*

In the Vonwiller collection.

——. *Cristo morente. (Study.)*

In the possession of the artist.

See the illustration facing page 46. The words vaguely inscribed upon the background are " *Pater dimitte illis ; non enim sciunt quid faciunt* " (Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do).

1870. Odalische che ritornano dal bagno.

Originally in the collection of the Contessa di Melita.

Present owner unknown.

——. Odalisca.

Under this title Morelli has painted, at different times, a number of studies of women in oriental dress, usually half lengths.

1871. Cristo beffato.

In the collection of Signor Nicola Mollo, Naples.

1871. Le Donne cadute risorgono dalle acque del Bosforo.

In the Vonwiller collection.

1871. Una Strada di Costantinopoli. (Water color.)

In the Vonwiller collection.

1873. Mater Creatoris. (Water color.)

This and the three following pictures all represent the Madonna or Madonna and Child. We have been unable to learn the names of the present owners.

1874. Janua coeli.

——. Vas insigne devotionis.

——. Regina prophetarum.



1874. *Talita cumi.*

In the collection of Signor Nicola Mollo, Naples.

See the illustration facing page 24. A replica of this work, with certain variations in composition, was painted for Goupil, and is now in a private collection in England.

1875. *Il Re Lear con il buffone ed il pazzo.*

In the collection of Signor Nicola Mollo, Naples.

1875. *Il Re Lear con la figlia.*

In the collection of the Signora Maglione Oneto, Naples.

1876. *Gli ossessi.*

In the collection of Giuseppe Verdi.

1876. *Una Donna dell' Oda.*

In the collection of the Signora Maglione Oneto, Naples.

1878. *Portrait of Signora Maglione Oneto.*

In her collection.

1878. *La Tentazione di S. Antonio.*

In the Pisani collection, Florence.

Three versions of this work exist; the one at Pisani's is the one which was exhibited at Goupil's in Paris in 1878, and which was

awarded the government prize at the Italian national exposition at Turin in 1880. Of the two other versions, — both differing in composition from the first and from each other, — one is in the collection of the Conte De La Feld at Naples, and the other is in the Vonwiller collection.

1880. *Vexilla regis prodeunt.*

In a private collection at Naples.

1882. *Un Arabo che suona.*

In a private collection at Naples.

——. *Un Arabo che canta.*

In the collection of Mrs. Stevens,
Naples.

——. *Un Arabo.*

In the Vonwiller collection.

1883. *La buona novella.*

In the collection of the Signora Eugenia Mylius, Milan.

1883. *Rosa mistica.* (Madonna and Child.)

In the collection of the Principe Artalia di Scoletto, Rome.

1886. *Stella matutina.* (Madonna.)

In the collection of the Principe Artalia di Scoletto.

——. *Salve Regina.*

In the collection of the Barone Compagna, Castello di Carigliano, Calabria.

See the illustration facing page 16. No date is assigned to this work by Madame Englen; but it must have been painted prior to 1887, since in that year was exhibited at Venice the *Madonna and Child* by Nicolò Barabino, in which the latter artist was charged by the critics with having imitated this work of the Neapolitan master. On internal evidence we should be inclined to assign the *Salve Regina* to a much earlier date than 1887; the light-and-shade, the attention bestowed upon details, and certain other academic qualities, allying it with the work executed by Morelli before 1870.

1887. *Maometto che prega prima della battaglia.*

In the Museo Civico at Trieste.

A replica of this work, differing in several particulars from the first version, is in a private collection at Palermo.

1887. *L' ultimo Farmaco.*

In a private collection at Turin.

1888. S. Aspreno.
Figure of S. Aspreno and another saint painted on the front of a "portantina" or sedan chair for the Pope.
1889. L' uscita dalla chiesa.
Owner unknown. Madame Englen believes the picture to be in America.
1889. Preci nella settimana santa.
In the collection of Dr. Cardarelli, Naples.
1890. Gesù nel deserto.
In the possession of the artist.
1891. Scene from the fourth chapter of the Apocalypse.
Executed in mosaic on the façade of the cathedral at Amalfi.
1893. Un Bagno privato in oriente.
In the collection of the Principe Pignatelli, Naples.
1893. Gesù chiama a sè i figliuoli di Zabdia.
In the collection of Señor Ovalle, Santiago, Chili.
1893. Amore degli angeli.
In the collection of Señor Ovalle.

1893. *Mater divinae gratiae.*

In the collection of Signor San Germano, Naples.

——. *La Cacciata dei Saraceni da Salerno.*

Design for drop curtain for the new theatre at Salerno.

The original study is in the Vonwiller collection.

——. *Guldina.* (Water color.)

In the Vonwiller collection.

——. *Portrait of Davide Vonwiller, Jr., and of Comm. Giovanni Vonwiller.*

Both in the Vonwiller collection.

——. *Le Marie al Calvario.*

In the collection of Signor Paolo Rontondo, Naples.

See the illustration facing page 40.

——. *Consolatrix afflictorum.* (Madonna.)

Owner unknown.

——. *Madonna della scala d' oro.*

In a private collection in Russia.

See the illustration facing page 32. The Madonna is represented descending the golden stair of the temple at Jerusalem, and hence the name assigned to the picture.

——. La Maddalena che vede il Redentore accusato dai Farisei per aver guarito il paralitico in un giorno di Sabato.

In a private collection in Belgium.

——. Conversione di S. Paolo.

In the cathedral of Altamura.

